

Message Text

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45

ACTION ARA-17

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 USIE-00 AID-20 SY-10 EUR-25 NIC-01

RSR-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 INRE-00 SSO-00

NSCE-00 /129 W

----- 101889

O 181522 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9932

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USCINCSO

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USCINCSO FOR POLAD

BOGOTA FOR ASST SEC KUBISCH

EO 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINS BL

SUBJ: SELICH AFFAIR

REF: LA PAZ 2971

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. IN A LATE NIGHT MAY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE MININTERIOR ARCE READ A
STATEMENT PLACING THE BLAME FOR SELICH' S DEATH ON THE POLICE
OFFICERS

WHO INTERROGATED HIM AND DENYING THE EARLIER OFFICIAL VERSION THAT
THE DEATH WAS THE RESULT OF AN ACCIDENTAL FALL DOWN STAIRS. ARCE

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ALSO PRESENTED A STATEMENT BY THREE POLICE OFFICERS WHO INTERROGATED SELICH IN WHICH THEY ADMIT THAT THEY BEAT HIM AND THAT HE DIED DURING THE INTERROGATION.

2. ARCE' S STATEMENT EXPRESSED REGRET OF THE DEATH OF SELICH AT THE HANDS OF THE POLICE. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE ASSUMED ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY AS MINISTER FOR THE ACTIONS OF THE POLICE, AT THE SAME TIME HE PERSONALLY HAD NOT WISHED SELICH MISTREATED IN ANY WAY OR THAT ANY HARM COME TO SELICH. ARCE SAID HE WAS NOT FULLY SATISFIED WITH THE POLICEMEN' S STATEMENT AND THAT HE INTENDED TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER AND BRING THE POLICEMEN TO TRIAL. ARCE REMINDED REPORTERS THAT A POLICEMAN HAS DIED AT THE HANDS OF THE CONSPIRATORS. HE ALSO SAID THAT SELICH HAS CIRRHOSIS OF THE LIVER WHICH MIGHT EXPLAIN THE LIVER DAMAGE FOUND IN THE AUTOPSY.

3. IN THEIR STATEMENT, THE THREE POLICEMEN SAID THEY HAD BEEN ACTING UNDER ORDERS OF THEIR SUPERIORS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION FROM SELICH WITH REGARD TO HOW HE GOT INTO THE COUNTRY AND WHO WERE HIS FELLOW CONSPIRATORS. THEY SAID THEY HAD HIM ONLY A FEW TIMES AND THAT THEY HAD NO INTENTION TO KILL HIM OR TO DO SERIOUS DAMAGE TO HIM. WHILE THEY ADMITTED HITTING HIM, THEIR STATEMENT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE, STRICTLY SPEAKING, AN ADMISSION THAT THEY KILLED HIM. WITH REGARDS TO THE RESULTS OF THEIR INTERROGATION, THE POLICEMEN SAID SELICH WOULD NOT REVEAL THE NAMES OF HIS FELLOW CONSPIRATORS, BUT SAID HIS PURPOSE WAS TO DESTROY THE COMMUNISTS AND DRIVE THE MNR OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT. END UNCLASSIFIED.

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4. COMMENT: THE FACT THAT SELICH DID NOT DIE AS A RESULT OF A FALL DOWN STAIRS WILL NOT COME AS A SURPRISE TO MANY BOLIVIANS; NO ONE WE HAVE TALKED TO HAS BELIEVED THAT STORY, AND THE PRESS AND SEVERAL OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY CALLING FOR AN INVESTIGATION. WHETHER THOSE MILITARY OFFICERS AND OTHERS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED RESENTMENT AT THE TREATMENT OF SELICH WILL BE MOLLIFIED WITH ARCE' S STATEMENT WHICH IN EFFECT LEAVES THE BLAME AT A LOW LEVEL IN THE GOVERNMENT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. TH ADMISSION BY ARCE IS CLEARLY AN ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE BLAME AT THE LOWEST LEVEL POSSIBLE, AND AT LEAST TO TRY TO KEEP IT FROM GOING AS HIGH AS THE PRESIDENT' S PALACE. IN ANY EVENT, THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS PUBLICLY VIRTUALLY ADMITTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT A PRISONER DIED AS A RESULT OF A BEATING BY POLICE OFFICERS DURING INTERROGATION IS, TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, UNPRECEDENTED. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
SIRACUSA

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NMAFVVZCZ

*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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